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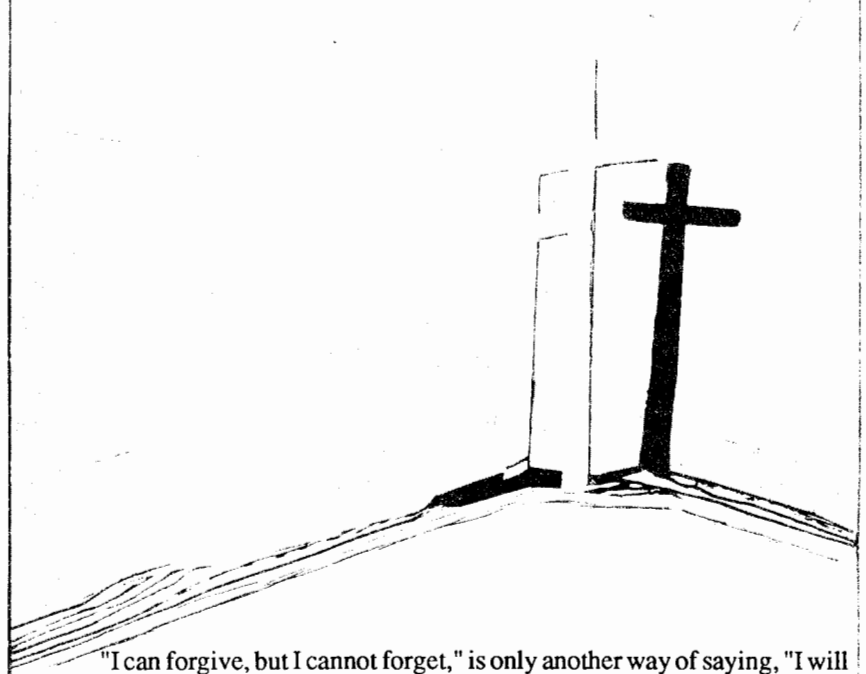

"I can forgive, but I cannot forget," is only another way of saying, "I will not forgive." Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note--torn in two, and burned up, so that it never can be shown against one.--*Henry Ward Beecher*

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Volume 34, No. 4 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **April, 1992**

What the Old Testament Means to Us. . .No. 14

CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.— Dt. 10:12

The purpose of this installment on what the Old Testament means to us is to show that while circumcision was a significant external ordinance in the religion of the Hebrew people it was its internal meaning that was important to God. This the prophets called "the circumcision of the heart," and this is always what God has wanted in every dispensation. It is not too much to say, therefore, that when Paul in the New Testament declares that "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6) that such was always the case, OT or NT, in Moses or in Christ.

It is of course more demonstrably true that it is in Christ that God wants "faith working through love," and it is in Christ that circumcision or the lack of it no longer matters, but it was also the case in the OT that God's interest in the external rite of circumcision was whether it was a sign of internal renewal, either on the part of the individual or the nation of Israel, God's covenant people.

When in Galatians 6:15 Paul repeats what he had said about circumcision not mattering anymore, he gave it a slightly different turn: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation." It is a new creation that matters! The first time he made the statement it was faith working through love that mattered. These are meaningful synonyms: it is faith working through love that produces the new creature or the new creation. This is what God always desires from those in covenant relation with him, OT or NT.

Ordinances of a covenant, whether circumcision, the sabbath, sacrifices, baptism, or the eucharist, are only that, ordinances. They are signs or symbols that stand for something deeper. As important as ordinances are they are at best external expressions of what is in the heart. David in Ps. 51 was addressing this truth when he wrote, "You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, these, O God you will not despise."

What God wants is a broken and contrite heart! David is saying in the OT what Paul says in the NT. When sacrifices and ordinances are expressions of faith working through love God is pleased. That is why David goes on to say in that same psalm, "Then you shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness." When God has his heart he will accept his sacrifices! That beautifully captures what religion is about. God is pleased with our baptism, our church-going, our presence at the Lord's table, the money we give, our good works *if* and *only if* he first has our hearts. And

it is the heart that matters most, not the ordinances. Otherwise we are subjects of such prophetic rebukes as, "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them . . . Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen." The prophet then goes on to the theme of heart religion: "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream." (Amos 5:21-24)

The point is that it has always been this way with God, and the OT and the NT do not differ all that much regarding this truth. God ordains circumcision of the flesh in the OT, but it is the circumcision of the heart that he really wants. God ordains the baptism of the body in the NT, but it is really the baptism of the heart that he desires most. Paul is saying this in Col. 2:11: "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ." He goes on to relate this circumcision of Christ (a matter of the heart) to baptism of the body in water: "buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."

This means that just as God's people in the OT were circumcised (in the flesh) and yet uncircumcised (in the heart), as the prophets charged, so those in the NT might be baptized (in water) and yet unbaptized (in the heart). Circumcised, yet uncircumcised; baptized, yet unbaptized. It is a dreadful analogy.

It may seem odd that God would ever have chosen circumcision as a symbol of the covenant between him and his people. What could the God of heaven have possibly cared about the cutting of the flesh from the male organ! There had to be some sign, so God chose a rite that had long been practiced by many nations of the ancient world, including Egypt. The neighbors of the ancient Hebrews all practiced circumcision except Philistia, hence "the uncircumcised Philistine" was a derogatory reference. God did not therefore "invent" circumcision for the sake of Israel.

It is the same with baptism, which was not unique to the Christian church, having long been practiced in one form or another not only in Judaism but in the Greek mystery religions as well. This shows that God was not working in a vacuum but within history, using both ideas and rites already in place, modifying them as needed, for his own purposes.

God first enjoins circumcision upon his people when he made a covenant with Abraham in Gen. 17:10-11: "This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised . . . It shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you."

In Ex. 4:24 there is an extremely perplexing reference to circumcision. For reasons unknown to us the Lord sought to kill Moses. Zipporah, Moses' wife, sought to appease the Lord by circumcising their son and touching Moses' feet

with the foreskin. Even though the story is perplexing it indicates the antiquity of circumcision. It also shows that it was not a priestly function. Anyone could circumcise, including women. Nor was circumcision part of the sacrificial system or even congregational. It was often a very private thing.

Circumcision remained *the* sign of the covenant all through the OT even though it related only to males. Those males born in the wilderness during the 40 years of wandering were circumcised under Joshua, according to Joshua 5:2. The context makes it clear that all the Hebrew males that had left Egyptian slavery had already been circumcised, showing that the rite had been practiced during all those centuries of bondage. When the passover was instituted it was mandated that no uncircumcised male could partake of it. Even a stranger who wished to join the feast would have to be circumcised (Ex. 12:48).

The rationale for circumcision remains uncertain. It is risky to conclude that God in all his wisdom created the male organ that would arbitrarily need surgery, just as it is unlikely that he would put the appendix in the body only to be removed. As far back into antiquity as Herodotus, the Greek historian, it was argued that circumcision was for sanitary purposes, but that has always been questioned, especially by modern medicine. Many physicians today no longer recommend it, unless it be for religious reasons, insisting that it inflicts unnecessary pain upon the child.

Among ancient tribes circumcision was a "coming of age" rite, and it was a tribal mark. It also may have been a vestigial remnant of human sacrifice.

As might be expected, it sometimes is used figuratively, such as the land of Canaan being "uncircumcised" (Lv. 19:23), and Moses referring to his halting speech as "uncircumcised lips" (Ex. 6:30).

It is enormously significant that the prophet Jeremiah would use this sign of the covenant in such a dramatically figurative way as "uncircumcised ears" (Jer. 6:10) and "uncircumcised in heart" (Jer. 9:26). It is used this way in Stephen's speech in Acts 7:51: "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you." But Stephen, like Jeremiah, was addressing people who had been dutifully circumcised *outwardly*.

This passage makes clear what is meant by the uncircumcised heart: resisting the Holy Spirit. Their fathers resisted the Spirit in OT times, Stephen tells them, and they resist the Spirit now. That uncircumcised in heart meant rebellion against God is also made clear in Dt. 10:16: "Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn." We can imagine how shocking it would be to a Hebrew, steeped as he was in the tradition of circumcision, to be told to circumcise the foreskin of his heart. Here we have an echo in the OT, amidst all the sacrificial rites, what religion is all about, *the heart.*

To charge circumcised people with being in some way "uncircumcised" was

the most degrading of accusations. It would be like telling saved people that they are lost, or baptized people that they are unbaptized. Ezekiel, for instance, in describing the worst possible fate for the king of Tyre says to him, "You shall die the death of the uncircumcised," and he describes Elam's fate as "going down uncircumcised into the nether world" (Ezek. 28:19;32:24). To be uncircumcised was hell itself.

So, the worst possible thing you could say to an orthodox Jew was to call him uncircumcised. When, therefore, Jeremiah tells Israel to "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts" (4:4), it is a scathing rebuke of their sinful lives. It was a call to repentance. When in 9:25 he says the Lord will punish "all those who are circumcised but yet uncircumcised," he was saying it is not enough simply to be circumcised in the flesh. The "knife" (the Spirit of God) must touch the heart.

Circumcised yet uncircumcised! Circumcise your hearts! It is one of the great moral imperatives of the OT. It is an imperative that transcends all ages and all dispensations, for it is the essence of true religion. It is why Paul could argue in Rom. 2:26: "If a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?" In verse 25 he has already said that if one breaks the law his circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, circumcision can become uncircumcision, and uncircumcision can be regarded as circumcision. It is enough to blow your mind!

This is a powerful lesson to those of us who put an undue emphasis on the outward forms of the NT, whether baptism or the Lord's supper. However important they are, they are but externals, and externals must reflect a devoted heart. And if the external is not exactly right, such as monthly instead of weekly Communion or sprinkling instead of immersion, might that be offset by a right heart? And how about the form being exactly right when the heart is less than devoted?

It is a weighty question as to whether we might be a "baptized yet unbaptized" people. We would feel as assaulted as Israel did if some daring prophet should cry out to us, "Be baptized in your hearts!" This is what Paul is saying in Col. 2:11 when he refers to "the circumcision of Christ," which is of the heart, not of the flesh, internal, not external. If this is not reflected in the external form of water baptism, then such baptism is meaningless. Heart baptism must go with water baptism.

In view of all this how judgmental can we be of those who are indeed baptized in their hearts but have mistaken the outward form?

This is a crucial part of what the OT means to us, that the God of the OT is no different from the God of the NT in calling for hearts and minds devoted to him. — *the Editor*

WHAT IT MEANS TO FORGIVE

If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. — Mt. 6:15

The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis as a Christian who stood up against Hitler, warned his fellow Christians against "cheap grace," a term that has come to be associated with his theology. Grace is cheap, he held, when it lacks commitment. Thus "the cost of discipleship" was not only the title of one of Bonhoeffer's books but the theme of his theology. Grace is God's free gift, he granted, but grace is also costly. The price to God was dear. The price to us is that we too must suffer. While grace is never of course earned, it nonetheless has its demands. The purpose of this essay is to point to forgiveness as Christ's unconditional demand for discipleship.

What our Lord taught about forgiveness is nothing less than astounding. It is the one subject he dealt with in absolute terms, with no exceptions: *Unless you forgive God will not forgive you.* It is so calculating and unequivocal that it strikes us with deadly force. Nothing is made clearer than that forgiveness is essential to discipleship, or, in Bonhoeffer's terms, the cost of grace is a forgiving heart.

Equally remarkable is that this is the one area where we are all vulnerable in that it is difficult for us to forgive. Even the most dedicated Christians carry grudges — "If you only knew what they did to me . . ." — and they are often unforgiving to the end. And of course they are right, from the human point of view, for those who do them wrong do not deserve to be forgiven. Forgiveness is illogical, even absurd. It makes no sense to forgive one who has done you a grave injustice. He doesn't deserve it. But that is what grace is about. It makes no sense for God to forgive us, for we don't deserve it either, but grace is not a matter of logic. Grace defies logic, for logic says to get even.

This is grace's demand: we receive grace from God, so we show grace to others. If we don't, we're not forgiven. It is that brutally simple and that brutally profound. Jesus is saying that it costs to be a Christian. It costs you your pride; it costs you yourself. You must forget yourself, forget your pride and forgive your brother.

It is my personal experience in talking to folk all across the country and around the world that the inability to forgive is a very common problem. When it comes to the bad things that are done to them, people have memories like an elephant. They can reach into the distant past and recall every slight and insult in detail. It is a hard way to live, for the "score of wrongs" keeps multiplying. It all contributes to depression and anxiety. While forgiveness is wonderfully liberating, it is a freedom enjoyed by too few.

Sometimes it is children that cannot forgive their parents, even after they are dead and gone, for either real or imaginary offenses. The tragedy of divorce is often

compounded by the unforgiving bitterness that festers for years afterward. We all suffer injustices and we all know they are difficult to forgive. Sometimes we can't forgive God for what he allows to happen to us, and, oddly enough, we can't even forgive ourselves for all those wasted years. One thing is sure: allowing old hurts to fester will do us in.

I recall a dear sister in the Lord in Missouri who took issue with what I had said at her church about that petition in the Lord's Prayer that says, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." She was disturbed by the idea that we are expected to forgive the really bad things that people do to us. She recounted the things that "they" had done to her husband, cruel things done by church people that had put him in his grave. She told of how he died of a broken heart after serving as a leader in the church all his life, and how he was driven out of the church he had helped build by longtime friends only because in his latter years he had become more liberal in his thinking. "All those mean things they said about him and did to him!," she moaned, "and you say I should forgive them!"

Already acquainted with the story, I knew she was telling the facts as they were. It was a sad story. She was right. "They," the brethren in the other church, had been cruel to her husband, and it probably contributed to his untimely death. She was adamant that in their case there was no way to forgive them, it was impossible for her. I was sympathetic. I knew where she was coming from, and I knew how it hurt. I agreed that it was probably beyond her power to forgive them, but that she could allow Christ to forgive them through her. She should "work at it" I told her, looking to the the Holy Spirit for the power to forgive. First, she must want to forgive, I told her, and ask Christ to come into her heart and forgive them through her. It may come slowly, bit by bit, but in time you will overcome the way you feel, I assured her.

In the meantime, I told her, she should not pray the Lord's Prayer when it says, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us," for she would actually be asking God *not* to forgive her. If God forgives us as we forgive, when we refuse to forgive, then he will not forgive!

This is one area where Jesus' teaching appears to be extravagant. Forgiveness seems to have no limits. It was impetuous Peter, who probably had a lot of forgiving to do, who put this question to Jesus, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Mt. 18:21) The Lord's answer was, "Not up to seven times, but seventy times seven." We are to forgive abundantly and extravagantly. It indicates that we are to forgive with abandon, whether the offender asks for forgiveness or not, which one might conclude from what Jesus says in Lk. 17:3, "If your brother repents, forgive him."

I have heard it argued that since God does not forgive us until we repent we are not to forgive others until they repent and say that they are sorry. If that is the case, we would hardly ever forgive, and if that is the case we would be winning and our

pride would be protected, for the offender has yielded to us and asked for forgiveness. In forgiving an offender we must be willing to lose. Forgiveness is not to be dependent on what he does but what we do.

It is not true that God forgives only as we repent and confess. There is no way for us to be "up to the minute" on asking for forgiveness. At any given moment there may be sins that we have not prayed about and may not be fully aware of. The wrongs that we do sometimes come home to us only after something else happens that causes us to realize how thoughtless or selfish we were, such as the way we responded to our mate or one of the children. But God forgives the sin as we commit it. If that is not the case, then we are all under condemnation, for there is no way for us to maintain a running checklist on all our sins. Forgiveness is a matter of God's grace, not our works.

Such is the promise of 1 Jn. 1:7 that assures us that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us (keeps on, continually cleansing us) of our sins." That is grace, and if we are gracious we, like our heavenly Father, will forgive people for what they do to us even while they do it. That is the ideal, but since we are not God and cannot forgive as readily as he does, we are to forgive as nearly like God as possible. As we grow in grace, God will increase our power to forgive more and more abundantly.

Jesus puts all this in a parable in Mt. 18 that we have a way of neglecting. There was this king that forgave one of his servants of an immense debt of millions of dollars (Note how the Lord continues to make it extravagant) only because he had compassion on him. But the same servant is harsh and demanding on a fellow servant who owed him only about a dollar (the extravagant again), throwing him into prison until he paid. When the king heard how unforgiving and unmerciful his servant was over so little after being forgiven of so much, he called him a wicked man and turned him over to his torturers.

Jesus concluded the parable with, "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses (Mt. 18:39).

This is sufficent to show that forgiveness is the essence of being a Christian. It gets to the heart of the matter. It may be a grim truth for many of us, but truth it is that if we are "from the heart" an unforgiving people we are not Christians. But I should think that if such teaching disturbs you there is hope. It is those in the church who hold grudges and are unforgiving and who pridefully wait for the other person to take the first step that bother me the most. — *the Editor*

He that cannot forgive others, breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven; for every one has need to be forgiven.---*George Herbert*

We Must Stand in the Grace of God. . .

WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DO TO BE SAVED? (14)

This is the true grace of God in which you stand. — 1 Pet. 5:12

Every member of the Church of Christ believes in the grace of God. They would all readily acknowledge that we are saved by the grace of God and not by our own works. No one among us has the slightest interest in minimizing the significance of the grace of God.

When I say in this installment that if the Church of Christ is to be saved it must, as the above passage indicates, *stand* in the grace of God, and not simply believe in it. The Church of Christ has a head knowledge of grace, but at the gut level it does not, generally, know the grace of God. To put it another way, we must come to terms with the grace of God, recognizing that it is a reality to be realized. It is like living in a house wired for electricity and not being plugged into the power. This is why we're not going anywhere, we're not plugged in.

When we consider what grace does for people, we do not appear to have "seen the grace of God," to quote Acts 11:23, even though we believe it is around. Grace makes believers more and more like Christ, but we are not known for our Christlikeness. Grace causes them to exult in their blessings, filling them with joy, good humor, and laughter; but we are not known for those qualities. Grace makes people gracious, less critical, more tolerant and more accepting; but is this where we are? Grace is never what one deserves, but is this what we have emphasized? Grace is God's free gift, unconditionally bestowed, no strings attached; but haven't we attached strings?

To put all this another way, the Church of Christ may be guilty of doing to the grace of God what Paul took pains not to do, as in Gal. 2:21: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." The RSV has it, "I do not nullify the grace of God," but Phillips may best express it with, "I refuse to make nonsense of the grace of God," or perhaps the Jerusalem Bible, "I cannot bring myself to give up God's gift."

This shows that it is quite possible for Christians to leave unopened God's precious gift of grace, which is to lay it aside unclaimed, or to make nonsense of it. Being the pragmatic individualists that we are, a "do it yourself" people, we can't believe there are really any free lunches, not even in religion. Grace can't really be a completely free gift, we figure, for we have to do our part — by repenting or being baptized, or going to church, or something! — for it is illogical that God would freely bestow his grace apart from our cooperation. It is our pragmatism, our

humanism, our fleshly pride — yes, our logic — that causes us to do what Paul sought to avoid, nullify the gift by failing to realize that it is free, *unconditionally* free. Of course it is illogical, that is what makes it grace. There is no logic in giving heaven itself to people that do not deserve it.

This is why we've never been able to accept the astounding truth set forth in Rom. 5:15 where Paul contrasts the penalty given to those who shared in Adam's fall (death) and those who benefited from the grace of God in Christ (life). Notice how Phillips has it: "Nor is the effect of God's gift the same as the effect of that one man's sin. For in the one case one man's sin brought its inevitable judgment, and the result was condemnation. But, in the other, countless men's sins are met with the free gift of grace, and the result is justification before God."

The best explanation of this is what Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." If we are blind to this staggering truth it is because we can't see grace for what it is. The apostle is saying, clear and simple, that in Adam all mankind died — *all* he says — and in Christ all mankind is made alive or given life — again, *all* humanity is given life in Christ. If the first *all* means everyone the second *all* means everyone. That is grace!

This means that in Adam's fall all people died, but when Christ died on the cross he died for all people and saved all people. Everybody is saved! That is the beauty of the gospel and that is why it is good news. To tell everyone that he or she is lost is bad news. Our message should be that God has saved you through Christ! Won't you accept it? Only those who persistently and finally reject the free gift offered will be lost. The Bible again and again makes it clear who will be lost, those who *reject* the gospel, thus refusing the free gift. Everyone else will be saved.

President Nixon's pardon illustrates this. He was guilty before the law. He did not deserve the pardon. There was nothing he did or could do that merited it. He was utterly helpless. A representative of President Ford delivered the pardon. Nixon only needed to accept the free gift by signing a document of acceptance. He said it was the most difficult thing he ever did.

Why was it so difficult? For the same reason grace as a free gift is always difficult for the pride of man to accept. If Nixon had been told he deserved the pardon for his devoted service to his country, it would not have been difficult for him to accept. Neither would it have been grace. Nixon's pardon was an unconditional free gift of grace, no strings attached. Only the enjoyment of the grace was conditional. He had to accept it.

An illustration I borrow from Alexander Campbell may be better. Campbell wanted to show that God's grace is unconditionally bestowed to all mankind, apart from any worth, merit, or works on man's part. But the appropriation and enjoyment of the grace is conditional. To illustate this he told a story of a ship at sea in peril in a raging storm. It was sinking and all on board were lost. An old captain of the sea

saw their predicament from the shore, and out of the goodness and mercy of his heart sent his son in a lifeboat into the dangerous sea to the doomed ship. The son cried to them amidst the storm that they were saved, beckoning them into the lifeboat. That is grace, Campbell said, sheer grace, apart from any initiative on the part of the lost. The bestowal and presence of the grace was unconditional.

But, Campbell goes on, to appropriate the free gift of grace and to enjoy its benefits, the men on the doomed ship had to get in the lifeboat. Like Peter did on Pentecost in Acts 2, the son could have cried out to the men on the doomed ship, "Save yourselves," but this can only mean something like "Accept the gift" or "Take advantage of what my father has done for you." It would be nonsense to say that the men did anything to merit the grace. They merely reached out and accepted an unconditional free gift of grace. That of course they had to do, but that made the grace no less free.

That is where baptism comes in. It is God's way of having us accept the gift. And even baptism is not something we do as much as it is something done to us. Baptism is an act of grace, appropriating for us the free gift.

And even if the men did, once in the lifeboat, cooperate with the son in maneuvering the boat through the tempestuous sea to shore, all of them rowing for their lives, their salvation was still only by the grace of the father. They "worked out their salvation with fear and trembling" because they had already been saved by grace, not in order to be saved by their own works. That is why we do good works, not to be saved but because we are saved.

While no illustration is perfect, that one goes far in showing what grace is and how we are to respond to it. Donald Barnhouse is credited with saying that love that goes upward is worship, love that goes outward is affection, and love that stoops is grace. That says it. Grace always stoops, to the point of being extravagant. Why should God give his Son to die for a recreant bunch like us? We are saved only because the great God of heaven chose to stoop to our level and lift us up.

The Church of Christ must boldly claim such great texts on grace as Eph. 2:8-9 as its own: "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." And Paul's great conclusion must be our own: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). And we must plug into some of Pauls not's — "Not having my own righteousness, which is from the law" (Philip. 3:9), and "Not by works of righteousness which we have done." (Tit. 3:5). Let's claim the free gift and make it our own. It is by God's grace, not by our works. It is mercy that makes us righteous, not our own goodness. It is by nothing that we do ourselves.

Only grace will free us from our legalism. Only grace will deliver us from the backwater of our sectarianism. Only grace will give us the assurance of our

salvation. So long as we are deceived into believing that "we have to do it" and that righteousness is at least partly our own doing, we can never be sure of our standing with God. We must realize that God's grace is not auctioned off to the highest bidder. We can do nothing to merit it, we cannot work enough to earn it, we cannot be good enough to deserve it, we cannot be rich enough to buy it, we cannot muster enough power to wrest it. Grace is God's free gift, all because he loves us, abundantly and extravagantly.

When we "stand" in the grace of God, trusting in his goodness and mercy, then love, joy, and peace will flood our hearts. We will then be a more gracious people, magnanimous, full of life and enthusiasm, eager to praise God for his great mercy. We will take ourselves less seriously and be able to laugh at our foibles. We will not be so uptight, we'll quit worrying, be less critical of others, more accepting, more forgiving.

It is the grace of God that has made the Church of Christ a great people, but that grace is waiting to do much more with us. If we will resolve now to be a grace-empowered people, not laying aside the free gift, not nullifying it, we will be destined for spiritual heights that "you would not believe if told" (Hab. 1:5).

The grace is there, stooped at our feet. Let's bend down and plug in and get going! — *the Editor*

WHAT THE PARTY SPIRIT DOES TO US

The problems in the churches of Galatia were such that the apostle Paul had cause to talk about human nature, which he saw, in this context at least, as higher and lower. The "lower nature," the rendition in Phillips and the New English, is referred to as works of the flesh (RSV), sinful nature (NIV), and self-indulgence (Jerusalem) in other versions. This gives us a broad definition of the Greek term that Paul used, *sarx*, which Barclay defines as "the unregenerate self." It is our carnality, that part of us that is inclined to sin.

The apostle is not simply saying that this lower, carnal nature is to be controlled, but crucified. Since it is active voice it is saying that this is something we are to do to ourselves, with the help of the Holy Spirit of course. It is not something done to us, which would be passive voice, but we do it. We are to murder our sinful nature once for all. That our fleshly desires have a way of hanging on all through our lives, even if murdered, takes nothing away from the fact that they are to be treated with such finality as to be crucified. The apostle does not indicate, however, how much time such a crucifixion requires. Some of us have been at it a long time!

Paul is unequivocal in this context as to who a Christian is: *Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires* (Gal. 5:24). If the Bible at this point said it is baptism that makes one a Christian, it would be in our repertoire of memorized passages. A Christian is one who has murdered his sinful nature with its passions and desires? How amazing!

Equally amazing is what the apostle includes in the list he makes of "the works of the flesh" or the things that belong to our lower nature. We are not surprised to find, reading from Phillips: sexual immorality, impurity of mind, sensuality, worship of false gods, witchcraft, hatred, strife, jealousy, bad temper, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like that. Most of those were predictable, though we might be surprised to find jealousy and bad temper included in the more serious sins, and the inclusion of witchcraft should motivate us to keep our distance from the likes of Ouija boards, horoscopes, and fortune tellers, even when it is "just for kicks."

I left out three items in the above list so as to mention them now, and what a shock they are. Phillips renders them "rivalry, factions, party-spirit." The RSV has "selfishness, dissension, party spirit." The Jerusalem Bible says "quarrels, disagreements, factions." It is clear that Paul includes the quarreling, factious, party spirit as a work of the flesh, placing it alongside idolatry, witchcraft, drunkenness, and adultery. The party-spirit is to be crucified as well as hatred and anger.

Why is the party-spirit so serious as to be included in such a list of major sins? What makes it such a crucial sin that we are under mandate to murder it once for all? Paul would have his own answer, but here are some things that can be said about what the party-spirit does to us.

1. *It would have us love only those of our own party.* There is a love that "covers a multitude of sins," but such love is seldom shown to those outside our own group. While we scrutinize the behavior of others, we make excuses for our own and overlook their inconsistencies. When people come to see that to be loved and accepted they have to toe some party line, they realize that they are not loved at all for who they are but only as members of the party. This is made plain when they are given the cold shoulder for even a slight departure from any "issue" mandated by the party leaders.

When we love only those who are "of us" it is a different kind of love than our Lord urged upon his disciples, "Love one another even as I have loved you." Jesus' love was consumate and unconditional in that it included the unlovely, the undeserving, and even those that were "in error" and "living in sin." He may not have approved but he always loved and accepted.

2. *It causes us to draw lines on each other more quickly.* It is remarkable how slow Jesus was in drawing lines on people or giving up on them. As Jesus told the story of the Prodigal Son it is evident that he hadn't given up hope for him even when he was in the pig pen. "He came to himself," the Lord related, which pointed to his

nobler instincts. He didn't draw lines on such outcasts as lepers and beggars or such rejected souls as prostitutes and tax collectors. In eating with "sinners" he associated with folk who did not care about religion or church. But Jesus was not a party man. He was in fact murdered by the party spirit.

If we would be like Jesus, we will not draw lines on our sisters and brothers over matters where we may justifiably differ. We will never see everything alike, but we can start right now in receiving one another even as Christ receives us (Rom. 15:7).

3. *It tempts us to be satisfied with the truth we now have.* The dear old preacher who proclaimed proudly that he had not changed his mind on anything in 25 years had at least one thing going for him. He didn't have to worry about examining old ideas or entertaining new ones, which can be painfully humiliating. Truth sometimes hurts and growth is often uncomfortable, but the freedom that results is worth every sacrifice. But some people never experience such freedom in that they have already discovered all the truth. There is nothing else to learn, no new discoveries to be made, no questions that have not already been answered.

4. *It blinds us to the good in others and to truth held by others.* While there is much evil in the world there is also much good. We are blind in one eye when we see only the bad. We have much more in common with other believers than we are willing to admit. We agree far more than we disagree, and our agreements are usually on things that matter most, such as the centrality of Christ in our lives. Truth is truth wherever it is found and whoever holds it. It would do our souls good to admit that there are many in other churches whose lives are more exemplary than our own. But partyism blinds us to the good in others.

It is a terribly revealing fact that most folk grow up in our congregations without ever hearing anyone speak except those of our party. The implication is either that others are not equal to us or that they have nothing to teach us, or both. That we have little or no fellowship with other Christians shows that we are blind to the fact that they are as good as we are and that they too hold precious truths. Partyism keeps us from listening to other believers and learning from them. God intends that we love, accept, and enjoy one another in Christ, sharing in every good and perfect gift. Partyism obstructs such blessings.

5. *It makes us look ridiculously inconsistent to the world and to other Christians.* While partyism demands conformity for unity and fellowship, it never achieves it, not in a single church anywhere in the world. Every church has its disagreements. None of us sees everything exactly alike. But still each faction is uniform on "the issues" on which it draws the line of fellowship. And yet it allows for diversity in non-issue matters, which are major issues with still other factions.

It becomes even more ridiculous when we can't even call on a brother to lead us in prayer to our heavenly Father, however exemplary his life may be in the community, because he is "unfaithful," which means he has a different view of the millennium, or has a piano in his church, or gives alms through some agency. A "faithful" brother has to pray, one who is true to the issues, even if his life is less Christlike. Being right is what counts in a church faction! The world, which has a higher standard for human relations than that, is turned off by such nonsense.

6. *It shrivels our souls and could cost us our souls.* Lest we forget, the factious, party spirit is listed by Paul as carnal, as a work of the flesh. He warns that those who practice such things "will not inherit the kingdom of God." Thus the call for the crucifixion of anything about us that is sectarian. We are at war, Paul assures us, the Spirit against the flesh. Partyism shrivels the soul, making pygmies of us. It is joyless, graceless, and loveless.

When it comes to defending our social and political freedom, we will bear arms, go to war, and lay our lives on the line. But we allow factions and partyism to invade our churches and personal lives and rob us of our freedom in Christ, all without a struggle. We must realize that we are in mortal combat with the fruit of the Spirit against the works of the flesh, a war that must end only with victory. Liberty in Christ is the issue. We must stand up and be counted, declaring that "Christ has made us free" and that we will not allow ourselves to again be "entangled with a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

One thing is sure, there will be none of the ugly spirit of partyism in heaven. Let us each do all we can to end the sectarian spirit on earth. What a tragedy if we allowed it to rob us of heaven! —*the Editor*

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Cecil Hook

When I published my first book, I gave little thought to the obtaining of a copyright for it. As I continued to publish, various ones advised me on the advantages of copyrighting. I entertained the idea, but abandoned it.

The copyright notice would give some prestige to my book, I thought. It lends some sophistication, and that appealed to me as an unsure and unknown scribe. But who looks for the pedigree of a book before reading it?

A copyright requires that you not use my stuff without my permission. I may sue! And when permission is given to use it, give me the credit!

This leads me to question my purpose for writing. My intense desire to give redirection to my people moved me to publish my thoughts even though I knew I would meet the reistance of many of my brothers and sisters. Now that my material

is in print, do I wish to restrict its use? Surely not. When people tell me they have reproduced a lesson of mine for use in a class or to distribute, I am pleased. The more it is read the better. That helps to accomplish my purpose.

I considered the point that, if they are not copyrighted, opponents may use my teachings against me by misquoting, changing my meanings, and quoting out of context. But a regulation of law cannot stop that. Or, should God have copyrighted the Bible to avoid such misuse?

If I do not reserve all rights to my material, someone may plagiarize it. It is true that we "borrow" the thoughts of others, but should I be concerned about who propagates what I teach? If I am concerned that the message be spread, why should I be jealous of whoever teaches it? Am I trying to make a name for myself? I'll admit that it swells my pride a bit to be quoted, but I see my thoughts repeated by other in print without giving me credit. So what? My purpose is being fulfilled.

If I do not forbid the duplication of my material, someone may reprint and sell my product. Now we are getting down to the core of the matter! Money! I want to make money from my teachings. My books are going to make the best-seller list, and I am going to make a bundle!

This takes me back to my motivation: do I write to help others or to make money, or both? Books of a secular nature are written to make money. No problem. Is spiritual guidance for sale? Now we are lancing one of the pus pockets of religion — making a way of gain of spiritual things!

Do I not sell books? Yes. Being retired on Social Security, I cannot publish and distribute them free as I would prefer doing. But, being enabled by many concerned people who want the message of freedom in Christ to go out, we have distributed over 18,000 free copies of *Free In Christ*. A lesser number of my books has been given to persons who could not afford them. My nominal prices enable my operation but by no means pay for my labor; yet I do sell books. True to his promise, God has taken care of my needs.

Didn't Paul write, "The Lord commands that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14)? Yes, but Paul took his message to those who needed it without charge to them. He did not say, "Pay me and I will share spiritual things with you" He proclaimed his message without charge, being enabled by his own tentmaking and the help of other disciples. Then those who received the gospel could enable him to proclaim it to others.

David missed out on a gold mine by his failure to copyright his psalms. Perhaps Jesus would not have had to rely on John to provide for his mother if he had reserved all rights to his Sermon on the Mount. And by copyrighting and selling copies of his epistles Paul might have been able to give up tentmaking.

But what were their motives? Are mine as pure as theirs?

The law recognizes my ownership of anything that I create whether it is copyrighted or patented or not. The copyright only identifies my property prior to the time it might be contested.

Well, even though this little essay may not be too convincing, we who copyright and retail the spiritual blessings that we would impart have some soul-searching to do. — *1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Tx. 78130*

OUR CHANGING WORLD

The other day Ouida called me to our backyard to show me her garden of irises. She planted the bulbs months ago and now there is a rich stand so thick they will eventually have to be thinned out. The main attraction was the first full bloom of a single iris with several others about to break out in full glory. It was dominantly lavender in a network of rainbow colors, an unusually large iris, the perfect flower. We were captivated by its stunning beauty and marvelled at God's handiwork. How could such beauty spring out of the ground like that! That single lovely flower standing alone in our otherwise not-so-beautiful backyard seem to be saying that in spite of all the ugliness in the world it had its job to do. Not a bad way to view things, stand and bloom where you are, doing what God intends for you. That may be as good a definition of beauty as any. Ouida is not only busy with gardens front and back, but is still redecorating our home. She still says that not having her mother to care for takes some getting used to.

Stephen Bilak, Church of Christ missionary to the now former Soviet Union, recently reported on the changes that have taken place since he went there 30 years ago. Back then the Soviet Union was a closed society, and the only way to reach the people with the gospel was by radio and by smuggled copies of the printed word. In recent weeks his ministry has delivered 40,000 copies of the New Testament to Ukrainians in their own language. He has received 7000 letters of appreciation from people who received free Bibles, while a few years back such letters could not have been posted. A radio station is broadcasting for free some of Stephen's tapes. He can now set up offices for operation behind what was once the Iron Curtain, and in one office he has a hard-to-get telephone furnished by the governor. The ministry is now free to go ahead with such plans as the publication of tracts and hymnals, and video tapes in the vernacular of the people on how to study the Bible. PTL!

Arnold Hardin, Scyene Rd. Church of Christ, 2920 Prairie Creek, Dallas, Tx. 75227, edits a newsletter called *The Persuader*, which is a dramatic illustration of how freedom can break out in the most unpredictable places. Arnold has always labored among "the Antis" or "Conservatives" and is presently with a church of that persuasion. His mailout, intended especially for his own group, is a hard-hitting defense of the gospel of grace. He says things like, "Salvation by grace through faith was authored in heaven and ratified on Calvary. Salvation by law/works was authored by Satan and appeals to the vain foolish pride of sectarian minds and practices. How badly a correct view of grace is needed!" You can get on his mailing list free for the asking.

The Encyclopedia of American Religions sent me a copy of a description of "Churches of Christ (Non-Instrumental, Ecu-

menical)" that it had published, asking for any corrections that should be made for future editions. This journal was cited as the contact point, and the "organization" is described as taking a strong stand on unity, reaching out to a broader fellowship, and concluding that the Churches of Christ had become another sect. I do not know who wrote the description. I wrote to them and advised that while there is a renewal movement among Churches of Christ those involved do not consider themselves as separatists, but as part of the mainline churches. I explained that while there are 36 congregations listed in *The Churches of Christ in the United States* as "E" churches, meaning Ecumenical, they consider themselves regular Churches of Christ and not a separate faction. It is simply a persuasion or movement within the larger body, and those 36 churches come nowhere near representing the farflung effort for ecumenicity in mainline churches. I told them that I was uncomfortable with my journal being associated with a separatist group, for that was the very thing we seek to avoid, and that the article should be entirely dropped in future editions or referred to only as part of the several divergent persuasions within Churches of Christ. I pointed out that all persons referred to in the article, which included Norman Parks and myself, were members of mainline churches and not a separate Church of Christ.

We are pleased to announce that Lyndsay A. Jacobs, the immediate past president of the World Convention of Churches of Christ, has been named the new general secretary of that organization, which is an umbrella convention for all branches of the Stone-Campbell movement. Lyndsay is a New Zealander, but he and his wife Lorraine, who will serve as associate general secretary, will move to Nashville for this assignment. This convention, which attracts Campbellites from some 50 countries, meets every five years, the next convention being in Long Beach, Aug. 5-9 of this year. This is a ministry you should know about and take part in. I have been a part of the World Convention for many years, serving presently on the executive committee, and I have written the study guide that will be used at the Long Beach convention, which Ouida and I plan to attend. For further information write to the WCCC, 100 N. Central Expwy, Suite 804, Richardson, Tx. 75080. The office will move to Nashville later this year.

The Christian Science Monitor has coined a new word to identify a new dimension of America's reading habits. Besides the millions of illiterates in this country, a problem with which we are all acquainted, there are many millions more who are aliterates, referring to those who can read but won't or don't. Hard core illiteracy is about 5%, functional illiteracy is about 15%, a disturbingly high number. Aliteracy may run far more than illiteracy. One reason is that Americans are overworked and have no time to read. Another reason given is laziness. A study by the American Booksellers Association found that last year 60% of American households did not buy a single book. The *Monitor* believes the solution lies with the schools where the habit of reading must be ingrained. It cites a high school in suburban Chicago as a model where everything stops for 15 minutes a day while everyone, from janitor to principal, reads for pleasure.

The Institute of Christian Studies in Austin, Texas will host its eleventh annual Ministers Sermon Seminar May 25-28. The goal of the seminar is to aid the minister in the task of biblical preaching. Lectures will focus on the relationship between insights derived from biblical studies and sermon preparation. An emphasis of the seminar is the process by which biblical texts can be made applicable to today's world. Mike Armour of Dallas is one of the speakers.

READER'S EXCHANGE

I cannot say that I have been productive of late in our area of history. I am 88 years of age, but not beyond talking! So, it would be a pleasure to see you at any time. — *A. T. DeGroot, Rowlett, Tx.*

(It was a delight to reestablish contact with Al DeGroot, longtime professor at TCU, and, along with the late W.E. Garrision, a dean among Disciple historians. I have always been impressed by his description of restorationism as inherently divisive and amused at his reference to the Independent Christian Churches as "Church of Christ No. 2"! He is now widowed and living in a retirement village in the Dallas area. I hope to visit with him soon. — *Ed.)*

Harding College has all the *Mission Messenger* except for part of 1965, all of 1966, and part of 1977. They have *Restoration Review* from 1957 to the present, which is all of them. I often point Bible students in that direction. — *Ron Speer, Searcy, Ar.*

We have enjoyed and been enlightened by your thought provoking articles. Our journey out of legalism has been slow and painful, but it is happening, and others are beginning to join us in this wonderful adventure. We are grateful to you and especially to Cecil and Lea Hook who have become very dear friends. — *James A. Dillon, McMinnville, Tn. 37110*

We are glad we have been able to enjoy your paper for over 20 years. We will miss it when it ceases. After all these years it is like having a visit with an old friend. — *Jeff and Renie Sperry. Annistan, Al.*

The two of you have touched the hearts and lives of so many people. God bless you richly and may your sunset years be your best ones. Life is hard, but God is good. I love you. — *Rachel Howard, Anderson, In.*

We shall regret it when you cease publication but can understand the choice. You have made a contribution beyond your knowledge to the brotherhood you love. — *Ike Summerlin, Austin, Tx.*

(I appreciate Ike recognizing something that is important to me, that I love the people among whom I have worked for change. I hope it has been evident in my writings all these years. — *Ed*)

"In A Country Cemetery" was a beautiful tribute to Mother Pitts. We will all come to this. It is important that some care and love. I consider you a dear old friend. I remember the unity meetings at Bethany College in the 70's, and one in Pittsburgh in 1976. I shall miss your paper. But perhaps there is another "angry youg man" somewhere that God will raise up who is willing to spend himself for truth and freedom. — *R.D. Ice, Phillipi, WV*

Enclosed you will find a check and a membership listing for those we would like to receive RR for the duration of 1992. It has been a great blessing to our members here to have received the paper over the years. I would recommend that other churches subscribe to the paper for their members. It is going to be difficult for those of us who have grown up with the paper to be without it. It is like losing an old friend, one that is trusted and true. — *Bill Henry, Liberty Street Church of Christ, Trenton, NJ*

BOOK NOTES

We are pleased to announce the publication of a new book entitled *Our Heritage In Unity and Fellowship,* made up of the writings of Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett. Edited by Cecil Hook, who writes an introduction, it is a substantial book, handsomely printed, of some 360 pages and deals